

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Attacks in Uganda Show Need for Stability in Somalia, Envoy Says

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The top U.S. envoy to Africa says the July 11 bombings in Kampala, Uganda, constitute a “wake-up call” to East African nations and the international community, warning that continued instability in Somalia now can affect that country’s neighbors in the form of terrorism, as well as through continuing illegal arms smuggling and refugees.

Speaking to reporters July 27 from Kampala, where he is attending the African Union (AU) summit, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson said the attacks, claimed by the Somali extremist group al-Shabaab, mark the first time that the group has used suicide bombing techniques outside of southern and central Somalia.

“This constitutes a threat, and I think the regional states are genuinely concerned about the capacity of Shabaab to do this, its ability to move in the region to do it, and its willingness,” Carson said.

If al-Shabaab could strike the Ugandan capital, located several hundred kilometers away from Somalia, “it also is a threat to all of Somalia’s regional neighbors, from Djibouti and Ethiopia and Kenya all the way down to Tanzania,” he said.

Because al-Shabaab is affiliated with al-Qaida, the international community also has to take the threat seriously, Carson said, recalling al-Qaida’s 1998 attacks against the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, and its 2002 attacks against Israeli targets in Mombasa, Kenya.

In order to limit the capacity of al-Shabaab to operate in the region, Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) needs to be strengthened, Carson said. He also said the United States thinks that Somalia “has been neglected by the international community,” and that American diplomats at the AU summit had taken the opportunity to raise the issue with African nations as well as the United Nations and European Union representatives to “look at how to develop a strategy to help strengthen the Djibouti peace process” and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeeping force.

“I think that it is time for the international community to act on its past promises and commitments and support the [Intergovernmental Authority on Development] nations, the Djibouti peace process and the AMISOM mission that is on the ground,” he said.

According to news reports, the African Union decided July 27 to allow AMISOM to add 2,000 troops to its current 6,300-member force. The organization also decided to lift the cap that had held AMISOM to an 8,100-troop maximum.

Carson said that there had been discussion at the AU on how to provide AMISOM with better artillery and counter-battery measures in an effort to limit the prospects and possibilities of civilian casualties.

While harm to civilians is neither “desirable or acceptable,” Carson said civilian casualties are sometimes an unfortunate reality of conflict.

“I think that some of the tactics employed by al-Shabaab are responsible for some of the civilian casualties that have been reported in the press,” he said, particularly when the group “moves in and out of market areas, in and out of civilian residential areas with the clear intent of using those markets and those residential units where civilians reside as a place where they can launch ... mortars and fire their weapons.”

The AMISOM troops are aware of this and are exercising precautions, Carson said. They are also aware of their need for more accurate weaponry, as well as better intelligence collection so that they can take preemptive action against al-Shabaab.

The U.S. ambassador to the AU, Michael Battle, added that among the summit participants there is “a very high level of consciousness about trying to make sure that collateral damage is significantly reduced.”

AMISOM is trying to increase its capacity to push al-Shabaab farther away from the center of Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu, he said.

“By AMISOM being able to increase its numbers and to push al-Shabaab further and further away from highly populated centers, that also will reduce along with the technological counterbalances the number of civilian casualties,” Battle said.

In March, Carson estimated that U.S. support for AMISOM has been “in the neighborhood of \$185 million” since August or September 2008.

Carson said the United States has “supported the acquisition of nonlethal equipment to the governments of Burundi and to Uganda in particular,” as well as Djibouti, ranging from communications equipment and uniforms to transportation and support for Ugandan military training of TFG forces.

Tough Global Financial Standards Sought by U.S.

Washington — Having enacted a comprehensive financial reform law, the United States is calling on other nations to move “decisively and rapidly” on measures to make their financial systems sounder and more resilient.

The passage of the Wall Street reform bill lays the foundation for a system “less prone to destabilizing bubbles and panics, and one that is more open to a stronger and more competitive real economy,” a top Treasury official told the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a policy research group.

“The challenge before us now is to ensure that the world’s standards are every bit as strong as America’s,” because the interconnectedness of financial firms and markets makes tough national regulations less likely to be effective without similar standards around the world, Lael Brainard, Treasury undersecretary for international affairs, said July 26.

She said global regulatory convergence is essential for such issues as capital standards and the treatment of derivatives. In other areas, she said, it is better to agree on common principles to guide what will likely be different approaches taken by different countries. “These approaches will reflect deeply rooted differences in national institutions and business models,” she said.

Brainard said tougher capital standards — “harmonized internationally” — are particularly important for ensuring a more resilient global financial system.

The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, a group of policymakers from 27 countries, has been working for some time to find a common position among central banks and national regulators on toughening banking standards to avoid another financial crisis. The committee announced a partial agreement on the day Brainard spoke, but the agreement did not include the most controversial issues, such as how much in capital reserves commercial banks would be required to hold and what levels of debt they would be allowed to use in their operations.

An agreement by the Basel Committee on those standards is expected by the end of 2010, Brainard said.

Brainard also addressed the most pressing issue for governments and central bankers in developed countries: When can you withdraw the money recently pumped into financial systems without endangering the economic recovery? Countries around the world have accumulated large budget deficits because they pushed through public spending programs to mitigate the recession in 2008 and 2009. Now, international groups and private-sector

economists voice concerns that, without credible plans to restrain public spending, government deficits may jeopardize fiscal stability in the medium term.

Brainard said the Group of 20 summit in Toronto in June agreed on principles and on specific milestones toward fiscal sustainability.

But the pace of pulling economic stimulus back “has to be carefully calibrated” as different countries make decisions based on the state of their economies and overall global conditions.

“We have to be careful not to have an overly accelerated withdrawal,” she said.

The steps toward fiscal austerity taken in Europe, particularly in Germany, in the wake of the Greek crisis have caused worries that the euro-zone countries may go too fast with their withdrawal and may threaten economic growth and worsen global trade imbalances as a result, according to a June paper by the Peterson Institute of International Economics. The United States, however, has been urged by the International Monetary Fund and some academics to come up with a more aggressive plan to tackle its budget deficit and national debt.

Tenth AGOA Forum Is a Time to Assess U.S.-Africa Trade

Assistant U.S. Trade Representative Florizelle Liser talks to America.gov

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington — The 10th annual United States-Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum, known as the AGOA Forum, convenes its ministerial meeting in Washington August 2, offering an excellent opportunity to look at U.S.-Africa trade today and agree on new strategies for tomorrow.

Florizelle Liser, the assistant U.S. trade representative for Africa, made that point in a July 23 interview with America.gov.

“Ten years ago when we put AGOA in place, I think we were clear that we wanted to provide more market access for Africa’s valued-added products into America’s market. We understood that was important and that there were some key sectors ... that would really stimulate growth in Africa. We have seen some of that growth,” she said.

The level of U.S.-Africa trade under AGOA, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, has skyrocketed, she said, but she acknowledged that most of that trade is in oil and

minerals. But even when oil is not considered, there has still been a diversification of trade between the United States and Africa, she said.

[Total two-way trade between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa increased 57 percent over the first five months of 2010, compared with the same period last year, reaching \$33.1 billion. U.S. exports to sub-Saharan Africa rose by 7 percent to \$6.4 billion during the first five months of 2010.

U.S. imports from sub-Saharan Africa increased by 78 percent to \$26.6 billion in the first five months of 2010. AGOA imports increased 74 percent to \$18.8 billion during this period. AGOA non-oil products included vehicles and parts, apparel, jewelry, fruits, wines, nuts, spices, nuts, spices, vegetables, baskets, cocoa powder, cocoa paste and seafood.]

"When we first started AGOA, we largely did not have apparel coming in from African countries. We did not have footwear coming in. We did not have value-added agricultural products coming into the United States or automobiles coming in from Africa," she said. This has been changing, and Liser sees that as good progress. But, she said, "we also have to be frank about something that we started to realize along the way — that Africans, even with the market access — did not really have the capacity that would allow them to take full advantage of AGOA."

Liser observed that some of the 38 eligible countries under AGOA still do not export to the United States.

"We have to be frank about that, so this is a good time to assess and a good time to talk about what we need to do, what the Africans need to do to help them to take advantage of AGOA. That is why the title is 'AGOA at 10: New Strategies for a Changing World.'"

To move the U.S.-Africa trade agenda forward, she said, Africans must be able to build more productive trade capacity — or become more internationally competitive — in manufacturing and other areas such as food products, footwear and apparel. Increased investment and an improvement in African business environments, as has happened in Rwanda, must also take place, she said.

"It is also about the Africans being more savvy about who they are competing against," she added.

"The global market for apparel is very competitive. The Africans are going up against countries like China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and for them to be competitive or more competitive in the apparel sector, they have to know how to deliver the products faster, be more responsive to U.S. buyers and cut their costs of producing those items,

which also includes working to lower energy and transportation costs.

"Those are key things that we think have to happen," she said, along with a higher level of good governance and greater transparency across Africa.

On the U.S. side, she said, the United States "needs to be committed — and I think we are — to trade capacity building in Africa, particularly through programs operated by the United States Agency for International Development across Africa and through targeted bilateral assistance as well."

Touching on the heavily weighted oil trade, which makes up much of the trade under AGOA, Liser acknowledged that "Africa has a lot of petroleum and a lot of raw commodities and natural resources," and so that level of trade is to be expected. "The big challenge for them will be to change their typical pattern" by adding value to their products before exporting them, she said.

"The Africans need to add more value to their own resources in their own countries. Apparel is one field that qualifies for that category. They have a lot of cotton. They ship a lot of raw cotton to lots of countries in the world.

"However, their economic growth will depend more on making the cotton into yarn, then into fabric and apparel, than simply sending raw cotton to others who are going to do the same thing" and thus letting others gain from the added value.

Liser said the Africans export oil to many countries worldwide. What is unique in the U.S.-Africa trade relationship, she said, is that the United States imports a broad array of African value-added products along with its large oil imports.

"A lot of other countries will allow African countries to ship them their oil and raw commodities, but when the Africans add value themselves, then those other countries either don't want them or there are suddenly higher duties" charged.

Overall, Liser sees things improving under AGOA. "Many African governments, thanks to AGOA, have now reduced the time it takes to set up businesses in their country and are working to streamline their regulatory environments to better support business."

"We have seen a definite improvement in that," she said. "Also, intra-African trade is increasing and that is good. It's pretty hard to say you are going to make it easier for American businesses to operate in Africa while you still have barriers to doing business with your neighbors right next door."

AIDS 2010 Calls for Resources, Ends with Strong Science Findings

United States to host the 2012 International AIDS Conference
By Cheryl Pellerin
Science Writer

Washington? Universal access to treatment, progress in scientific understanding of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and the importance of human rights in responding to the disease highlighted the 18th International AIDS Conference.

Nearly 20,000 attendees from 193 countries included scientists; health care providers; political, community and business leaders; government, nongovernmental and multilateral organization representatives; and people living with HIV/AIDS. They met in Vienna July 18-23 for the annual gathering. Nearly 250 sessions covered science, community and leadership.

"International governments say we face a crisis of resources, but that is simply not true. The challenge is not finding money but changing priorities," AIDS 2010 Chairman Dr. Julio Montaner, president of the International AIDS Society, said on the final day of the conference. "When there is a Wall Street emergency or an energy crisis, billions upon billions of dollars are quickly mobilized. People's health deserves a similar financial response and much higher priority."

Also on the last day, President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton sent video messages to attendees in Vienna.

"Ending this pandemic won't be easy and it won't happen overnight. But thanks to you we've come a long way and the United States is committed to continuing that progress," said Obama, who on July 13 released a National HIV/AIDS Strategy that seeks to reduce the number of new infections in high-risk groups and increase access to care in the United States.

"Together we have mounted one of the greatest public health responses in history," Clinton said. "Through your tireless efforts we have begun to halt and reverse the epidemic, and millions of lives have been saved."

The United States, working through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, is the largest contributor to global AIDS programs.

VIENNA DECLARATION

In 2008, according to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 33.4 million people were living with HIV, up from 29 million in 2001. New HIV infections

are believed to have peaked in the late 1990s and declined between 2001 and 2008, from 3.2 million to 2.7 million, even though there were more than 7,400 new HIV infections a day in 2008.

Most new infections are transmitted heterosexually, but risk factors vary. In some countries, men who have sex with men, injecting drug users and sex workers are at high risk for HIV infection.

By July 26, nearly 14,000 people had signed the Vienna Declaration. This official declaration of the conference seeks to improve community health and safety by calling for more rational and scientifically sound drug policies to strengthen HIV prevention among people who use drugs. Conference organizers characterized as a "disconnect" the gap between current knowledge and access to HIV prevention and treatment services for those who use injected drugs in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

"Though injecting practices fuel the region's epidemic, access to scientifically sound strategies, including needle and syringe exchange programs and opioid substitution therapy, are scarce and even illegal in many locations, including Russia," according to the official conference press release

HIV SCIENCE

Scientists around the world reported progress in several areas. A microbicide gel containing an anti-retroviral drug was shown to be modestly effective in reducing the risk of infection by the HIV virus in a clinical trial of women volunteers in Durban, South Africa. Another trial already in progress and others that will be conducted to improve the product's effectiveness could move the product toward availability within several years, scientists said.

Several research laboratories, including that of Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the U.S. National Institutes of Health, reported findings about the earliest stages of HIV infection. HIV targets CD4 cells, a type of white blood cell.

"Fauci's lab has identified a specific type of CD4 cell that's especially vulnerable to the first infection, and then several other groups today talked about similar findings of that first cell and what it looks like," Jon Cohen, a reporter for Science magazine who is providing coverage of the meeting for the Kaiser Family Foundation, said in a July 22 interview.

"They all found slightly different things and some overlapped, but the basic idea could really influence future development of vaccines" and possibly a cure, he said.

"If it's the first cell that gets infected, what if a vaccine could make an immune response that's targeted to protecting that cell? And the cure idea is simply, if that cell is particularly vulnerable, there's going to be more HIV in it, what if you could wipe out those cells?" Such basic research could take many years to yield a new vaccine or drug.

Principal investigators of a clinical trial called the Cambodian Early Versus Late Introduction of Antiretroviral Drugs (CAMELIA) announced that it is possible to extend the survival of untreated HIV-infected adults with very weak immune systems and newly diagnosed tuberculosis (TB) by starting anti-HIV therapy two weeks after beginning TB treatment, rather than waiting the standard eight weeks.

The study, co-funded by NIAID and the French National Agency for Research on AIDS and Viral Hepatitis, was launched in January 2006 at five sites in Cambodia, a country with a high prevalence of TB and HIV.

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